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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001358

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: ECOWAS EXSEC CHAMBAS SAYS OBASANJO
IS FIRM ON TAYLOR DEPARTURE

Classified By Charge Dawn Liberi. Reasons 1.5 (b) AND (d).

1. (C) Summary. During an August 5 conversation with Charge, ECOWAS Executive Secretary Mohammed Chambas said President Obasanjo affirmed that Charles Taylor would be evicted from Liberia if he refused to leave willingly. However, Chambas characterized Taylor as conflicted, pulled by his expansive ambitions and a chorus of bellegent hardliners on one hand versus the pragmatic tones of the small band of GOL moderates on the other. Although still voicing a commitment to leave Liberia, Taylor had recently raised concern that details of his departure-accommodation, size of his coterie, and the fate of his personal effects-needed to be finalized before he embarked on his last flight from Liberia. Chambas planned to travel to Conakry on August 7 to asked President Conte to make sure LURD remained on its best behavior, given the ongoing ECOMIL deployment. The process of finalizing a peace agreement was moving forward; LURD and MODEL seemed to be approaching the realization that control of the transitional arrangement will be beyond their grasp. His August 5 letter to Secretary Powell was not asking for significant deployment of American troops but only a small number of troops to Robertsfield Airport and Freeport to show that America supported ECOMIL. End Summary.

TAYLOR MUST GO

2. (C) Weathering the rigors of his job and the Liberia crisis, a relaxed ExecSec Chambas told Charge that he had met President Obasanjo August 5. President Obasanjo iterated that Taylor would leave Liberia voluntarily or involuntarily, but go he must. Although Obasanjo had not given Taylor a specific time, Chambas felt Obasanjo would give him a deadline soon. Becoming uncharacteristically stern, Chambas asserted ECOWAS realized that its troops would be in an uncommodious position if Taylor did not leave. LURD and MODEL would suspect the ECOWAS deployment was a guise for protecting Taylor and they would be itching to assault Monrovia once again. If Taylor put ECOWAS in this vise, Obasanjo would retract the asylum offer and Taylor would be left to his fate, Chambas sounded.

TAYLOR: TALKING WITH TWO TONGUES

3. (C) Recounting his meeting in Monrovia with Taylor and the Ghanaian and Nigerian Foreign Ministers, Chambas recalled Taylor confirming that he would announce his intent to resign an August 7 and promised to fulfill that intention in an August 11 handover to Vice President Blah. Chambas stressed, however, that Taylor failed to state he would leave by August 11.

4. (C) Instead, Taylor raised logistical concerns about the quality of accommodation awaiting him, the number of people he could take and the disposition of his vast inventory of personal property. Neither Chambas nor the two foreign ministers could assure Taylor but they got the distinct impression that they had just witnessed a masterful display of procrastination.

5. (C) Chambas surmised that internal conflict within Taylor's inner circle as well as Taylor's inflated powerlust were the main ingredients in his temporizing. While moderates were warning that the clock was soon to strike twelve, hardliners such as Benjamin Yeates and J.T. Richardson were warning Taylor that he should not leave them in Liberia.

Chambas was warned that if Taylor remained in Liberia after the final handover to Blah, the hardliners would increase their influence over Taylor, convincing him to try to remain.

16. (C) To lessen the influence of these elements, Chambas hoped that Taylor could be convinced to leave immediately after the planned August 11 resignation ceremony. Presidents Chissano (as AU Chairman), Kufuor and Eyadema planned to attend. With these Heads of State present, the extremists in Taylor's camp will be on their best behavior; this would be the best chance to escort Taylor out with a modicum of difficulty. Chambas added that Taylor's reluctance to leave was reinforced by his lack of desire to settle in Nigeria. At one point, Taylor had suggested Burkina Faso as a better site but President Kufuor, as ECOWAS Chairman, quickly stuck a pin in that idea.

DEPLOYMENT - ALL WELL SO FAR

17. (C) Chambas remarked Nibatt I's deployment was proceeding smoothly. The LURD had not raised any obstacles. Rumors that the GOL had contrived some incidents proved to be unfounded. Still, Chambas was worried that LURD might misbehave. Thus, he planned to visit Conakry to ask Conte to use his avuncular suasion to keep the LURD behaving responsibly.

18. (C) Chambas added that current ECOWAS thinking was to deploy a force of only 2300 instead of 3000. The make-up would be the two Nigerian battalions and a composite battalion from Ghana, Mali and Senegal. Regarding per diem for the force, Chambas explained that ECOWAS would be hardpressed to ask ECOMIL troops to accept less than their brother effectives in ECOMICI (Cote d'Ivoire) who were receiving 20 dollars a day plus 4 dollars for food. He mentioned that the UN had expressed willingness to foot the soldiers' food bill. Meanwhile, the UK had indicated it might give up to 3 million pounds to pay the per diem and for other soldier sustenance. (Comment: In separate conversation between Charge and British High Commissioner, the latter indicated amount was more likely to be 1 million pounds. End Comment). Chambas mentioned the need for logistical support as well. ECOWAS was establishing a special account in EKO Bank in Ghana for donor contributions. Additionally, Chambas stated ECOWAS would soon request the United States and perhaps the U.K. to second military procurement experts to help manage the use of proceeds from this fund.

PEACE AGREEMENT ON TRACK, HOPEFULLY

19. (C) Chambas was sanguine about the negotiations in Accra, commenting that the rival delegation has shown signs of increasing trust and compromise. The GOL team had dropped its objections to the draft agreement, he noted. LURD and MODEL were starting to soften their opposition to being excluded from the interim presidency or vice presidential slots(s). Another reason for going to Conakry was to persuade LURD Chairman Sekou Conneh to drop completely the LURD's official stance against the draft agreement. Chambas said that he might bring Conneh to Nigeria to confer with Obasanjo in hopes of convincing him that no one was against his political aspirations but that he must pursue them via elections and not as a down-payment for being a factional leader. However, Chambas admitted that ECOWAS was still searching for a candidate, acceptable to all sides, to lead the interim government after October.

ONLY A FEW GOOD AMERICAN MRN

10. (C) Regarding his August 5 letter to Secretary Powell, ECOWAS believed an American presence at Robertsfield Airport and Monrovia's Freeport would help secure those important transportation facilities, easing the deployment of more peacekeepers and of humanitarian assistance. Moreover, a visible American

presence would sober the factions. The LURD would be more willing to withdraw and the GOL less willing to exploit that withdrawal by trying to retake the facility. Chambas elaborated that ECOWAS was not seeking a large American footprint in either location. He felt a noticeable yet minimal presence at both sites would serve the desired function, particularly if accompanied by regular fly-over by US military air assets.

COMMENT

11. (C) Chambas was generally upbeat about the recent trajectory of events in Liberia. The cease-fire was mostly holding, the deployment was finally underway and factional opposition to the peace process was diminishing. However, Taylor's departure remained uncertain and Chambas is not under any illusion as to why. He knows that the only time Taylor is not lying is when he is not talking. Chambas realizes that ECOWAS must keep the diplomatic pressure, backed by the threat of arrest, on Taylor.

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